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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000823

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/07/2015

TAGS: PHUM PGOV KDEM BA

SUBJECT: GOB WARNS BAHRAIN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Classified By: A/DCM Hallie Hahn for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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1. (C) The Minister of Social Affairs publicly warned the dissolved Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) to stop its activities or face prosecution. In response, the BCHR pledged to continue its activities, which it said were in line with international law and human rights standards. Given that the GOB has already dissolved the Center, there is little the government can do to punish the Center other than to arrest or fine its members, which is becoming more likely. We are not optimistic either the Center or the government will be able to resolve the current impasse.

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GOB Warns of Possible Prosecution  
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2. (SBU) Minister of Social Affairs Dr. Fatima Al Belooshi stated publicly May 29 that the dissolved Bahrain Center for Human Rights had no right to operate and must stop its activities or face prosecution. She said that the 1989 Societies Law prohibits dissolved organizations from conducting activities and requires her to report any violations of this rule to the public prosecutor. She told reporters that she sent a letter to the prosecutor's office outlining some of the BCHR's activities in Bahrain, including a recent seminar against torture that several thousand people attended. The BCHR responded publicly May 30 and noted that Al Belooshi's actions went against a recent U.N. recommendation that the GOB lift its ban on the center's activities. The Center criticized the 1989 Societies Law and pledged to continue its activities, which it said were in line with international law and human rights standards.

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BCHR Activities Continue  
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3. (C) Since the BCHR was dissolved in September 2004, it has scaled down its activities but it is still an active organization. It regularly organizes seminars, rallies, and media campaigns, often in coordination with other societies, on discrimination, unemployment, torture, women's rights, Guantanamo Bay detainees, and other issues. In some cases, the BCHR isn't explicitly tied to the activity, but it is clear the Center is involved and its members freely admit that. The BCHR submitted shadow reports to the GOB's recent reports to the U.N. Committee Against Torture and the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Geneva, and BCHR leaders have given several presentations in the U.S. Despite the Center's defiance of the government ban, prominent BCHR members both publicly and privately say that their top priority is to normalize relations with the GOB. President Nabeel Rajab told PolOff that the Center has made numerous requests to meet with Al Belooshi and has not yet received a response. At the same time, there are elements in the BCHR that see provoking the government as part of their strategy to maintain visibility and support.

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Hate Mail Campaign  
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4. (C) Rajab said that upon his return from a U.N. Committee Against Torture meeting in Geneva in mid-May, an anonymous source launched a hate mail campaign against him. He claims hundreds of letters and thousands of mobile phone text messages were sent to him, his family, his employees, and others. The mail accused him of treason and spying for an unnamed foreign body. Rajab told PolOff that sources in the Shura Council informed him that the Bahraini intelligence service and Shura Council member Faisal Fulad are behind the campaign. (Note: Fulad is a founder of the Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society and was also present at the U.N. Committee Against Torture meeting. According to press reports, Fulad also received hate mail and death threats upon returning from Geneva. PolOff regularly meets with both Fulad and Rajab, and they frequently accuse each other of wrongdoing. End Note.)

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Comment  
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15. (C) Given that the GOB already dissolved the BCHR, there is little it can do to punish the Center other than to arrest or fine its members which, as a result of Al Belooshi's letter to the prosecutor's office, is becoming more likely. (Note: A final appeals hearing on the closure of the Center is set for June 14, but the BCHR is not optimistic that it will win this case. End Note.) The GOB has the legal grounds to prosecute Rajab and other BCHR activists, but it risks attracting significant international criticism to Bahrain, as the BCHR has strong ties with Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and other well-known organizations. Since the BCHR's troubles started last September, both the organization and the government have engaged in brinkmanship strategies, and there is little sign that BCHR is going to back down. We are not optimistic the current impasse will be resolved favorably.  
MONROE